

Sound Perspectives

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Networking Up

Introduction

“No one told me that a career in STEM would require me to be an entrepreneur!” summarizes a discovery commonly made by scientists, engineers, and other professionals. Whether in consulting, industry, or academia, success at all stages of your career is expedited as you develop entrepreneurial skills. One of these important, lifelong skills is networking. Although some might feel uncomfortable networking or think that their work should speak for itself, a slight shift in perspective can make networking more palatable and provide opportunities that you can get in no other way.

Indeed, consider yourself in the center of a web, connected to others in your field and at your place of employment. You have opportunities to assist those less experienced on the web through mentoring students or early-career colleagues (Bent, 2016; Gee and Popper, 2017). Peer networking is reaching out to those on roughly the same level of the web or stage in their career. These connections can provide camaraderie, support, and opportunities for fruitful collaborations starting as early as graduate school. However, if you desire to advance your ideas, you need to “network up” by connecting with experts and other influential people. At all levels, expanding your networking web requires making personal connections, from which lifelong mentoring opportunities and friendships can emerge.

Examples of networking are provided by the women honored at the Women in Acoustics Named Luncheons in 2018: Winifred Strange and Patricia (Pat) Kuhl. Here we highlight their careers and provide concrete ideas for networking up, with input from other Acoustical Society of America (ASA) members. We hope that these suggestions will increase motivation and help reduce fears as students and young professionals strive to network up.



Honored Women

Spring 2018 Honoree Winifred Strange

Winifred Strange is a pioneer in cross-language speech perception research and the influence of linguistic experience and perceptual training on nonnative speech perception. She completed her PhD in Psychology at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, in 1972 and then served as a faculty member at the University of Minnesota, the University of South Florida, Tampa, and the City University of New York Graduate Center. Winifred was elected a Fellow

of the ASA in 1992 and served as a member of the Executive Council from 2001 to 2004. In 2008, she received a Silver Medal in Speech Communication for her contributions to understanding speech perception.

Networking Up

Winifred supported and mentored more than 50 students and junior colleagues through 20+ federally funded grants. Her contagious enthusiasm for her field attracted students and colleagues from many disciplines. Winifred expanded the field of speech perception research through her inspiring mentorship and her active participation in national and international collaborative research. She has also been an excellent example in showing how having a nonacademic passion, in her case, dance, allows us to maintain a healthy work-life balance and, in return, energizes our science careers.



Fall 2018 Honoree

Patricia Kuhl

Patricia (Pat) Kuhl has devoted her research career to understanding speech perception and early learning of speech and language. Pat completed a PhD in Speech Science at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, and postdoctoral training at the Central Institute for the Deaf,

St. Louis, (MO), before joining the University of Washington, Seattle, as a faculty member.

Pat has served on numerous ASA committees and was the president of the Society from 1999 to 2000. As ASA president, she focused on issues close to her heart: women's and students' involvement. She initiated the ASA Student Council, which has improved the student experience tremendously (Flynn and Young, 2018), and the percentage of female members in the Society has risen significantly (Ronsse and Neilsen, 2017).

Pat has an extensive network that includes experts from around the world. Pat is a Fellow of the ASA, the American Psychological Society, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a member of the National Academy of Sciences. She has received many awards, including the ASA Silver Medal in 1997 and Gold Medal in 2008 for contributions to understanding how children acquire spoken language and for leadership in the Society. She belongs to the Seattle Hall of Fame: 125 Most Influential People in a 50-year History. Pat spoke at three White House conferences: First Lady Hilary Clinton's White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning in 1997, First Lady Laura Bush's Learning to Read Conference in 2001, and President Obama's Summit on Early Learning in 2014.

Discussion

Both Winifred and Pat are successful, in part, because of their ability to connect with people at all levels and share their enthusiasm for their research.

One of Winifred's former students, Kanae Nishi, recalls how Winifred provided her mentees with opportunities to interact in a casual setting with those in different career stages. "Her lab meetings were open to anyone interested. She is a big supporter of the multidisciplinary research environment and collaborations."

A senior mentor once told Pat, who was extremely nervous about making a research presentation, that she should concentrate on the fact that "science is always about the ideas, not about you." She has been living by that rule ever since. When there were difficult talks to give in front of hundreds of people or a research finding that was unpopular among colleagues, she focused on making the science clear, producing more and stronger experimental results, and seeking advice and comments from senior colleagues about her research. Through that process, she gradually established herself and grew her network.

For some, networking up may come naturally; for others, questions abound as to how to approach the experts. For specific advice, we consulted a few ASA members at different stages of their careers and who are based in different work environments. Their responses and advice that are found in a few of the many available references (e.g., Burnett and Evans, 2016; Misner, 2017; Golde, 2016) are summarized here.

General Ideas for Networking Up

Networking on all levels is a give-and-take process. As a student or early-career professional, you benefit greatly by forming connections with senior people. Natural concerns may arise that you are inconveniencing or bothering them, or you may have fears that you will be rejected by or upset them. If plagued by such concerns or fears, expand your focus to include the other person. Consider how this interaction can benefit the person with whom you are connecting. As your focus expands, nervousness lessens, and the interaction becomes more shared, balanced, and meaningful.

Try to engage in a balanced conversation by asking questions about their career and experiences while also discussing your background, ideas, and interests. Avoid over-the-top praise. Instead, prepare genuine compliments about their contribu-

tions (e.g., technical, professional, service to the community) and how they have influenced you or, better yet, others (Misner, 2017).

Although connecting with a wide variety of people is useful, efforts for networking up with those in your professional area benefit from preparation. When approaching an expert with whom you hope to connect, prepare by familiarizing yourself with the technical language and/or jargon of the field and a general understanding of their work and its value.

Many senior professionals appreciate the opportunity to help others, especially students. However, when approaching a senior person, remember that they are likely to have many obligations and only limited available time. When asking for help, try to leave a way for them to politely decline without embarrassment or suggest an alternate timeline. If they agree to meet with you, review a proposal, or give a presentation, find ways to efficiently use the limited time they have to offer. Never ask a senior mentor for a last-minute favor; make your request with a long lead time.

Networking at Conferences

Meetings, workshops, and conferences provide remarkable opportunities for learning and expanding your network. Make sure your speech, dress, and body language are respectful and professional at all times. (This holds for all professional interactions, especially job interviews.) Avoid complaining or sharing critical comments about colleagues; you don't want to be remembered for being negative.

At the conference, attend presentations and ask good questions. If you follow up with the speaker after their presentation, begin by briefly introducing yourself. Sometimes it's useful to lift your name tag up to eye level during the introduction so that they can see your name and affiliation, especially if spelling or pronunciation is tricky. If they know (or know of) your mentor or collaborators, mention your connections. Prepare business cards before the conference and tuck some in your name badge so they are easily accessible. If there is limited time for discussion, offer your business card and ask if it is OK to follow up with an email. Because conferences can be hectic, especially for people in leadership roles, follow-up communications should include a reminder of who you are, where you met, and about what you talked. One idea for following up is sending a "thank you" message, especially if the person spent significant time talking with you, referred you to another colleague, or gave you a new idea (Golde, 2016).

If you initiate a conversation that is awkward or ends poorly, try to take it in stride. After calming down, remind yourself that the other person might have a lot going on "behind the scenes" that may have influenced their reaction. Review the conversation to learn if there was something you could have said or done differently, then move forward (Golde, 2016).

Socials and coffee breaks are also great opportunities to overcome your natural fears about approaching people who you don't know or to whom you haven't yet been introduced. If you see someone standing alone, that's a great time to approach them and start a conversation.

Conferences are also a good time to look for opportunities to volunteer. Volunteering expands your network because you interact informally with others, including senior people. Shared experiences, such as those formed while working together on committees, create connections that make it easier to talk with people about other topics and expand your networking web in multiple directions. For students, the ASA Student Council has ways to get involved. Nonstudent volunteers are needed for numerous tasks (e.g., judging student talks, organizing special sessions). Volunteers are often requested at the open meetings of the technical committees.

Initiating a Discussion via Email

Because senior mentors receive a lot of unsolicited email messages, sending one to someone you've never met rarely works. If you are following up on a face-to-face meeting, such as at a conference, you have a better chance of receiving a response. If not, a good approach is to ask a trusted advisor or some other senior person you might have networked with informally to send an email introducing you to the senior mentor. Depending on the response, you can then follow up with your own email to the senior mentor with more specifics.

When composing an email to a new contact, use a professional tone and be sure to do your homework. Your initial email should be short and professional and include a clear subject line, a brief introduction including any professional connections, and where you've met before (if applicable). Develop an understanding of their contributions, experiences, or interests and ask specific answerable questions. A request for a phone call or video conference is often a good way to continue the connection.

Remember that senior people have a lot of email to wade through, so you will usually need to be patient. Wait at least

Networking Up

10 days before sending a second email and generally do not send a third unless they respond.

Connecting with Important People at Work

In addition to networking with those in your scientific field, it is necessary to build a network at your place of employment. These connections allow you to have people you can turn to as questions arise and have allies who can advocate for you. Take advantage of the natural opportunities that arise to mingle with people. Participate in social functions and events. Engage in balanced conversations, then follow up.

Another way to build your network is to look for opportunities to join committees or participate in other administrative tasks where you can interact with senior people outside your immediate work colleagues. Let the director of your program or your department chair know that you are interested in serving in this way. Often these leaders are asked to nominate people for these positions, so they usually appreciate knowing you will accept if asked. At the same time, be careful that you do not accept so many administrative tasks that it affects your work.

Conclusion

Networking up is the practice of seeking additional mentoring and opportunities throughout your career. Although finding your networking style will take practice, the first step is accepting that networking up is a good way to promote your ideas. If you focus on the ideas, as Pat Kuhl explained, it becomes easier not to take things personally and to push beyond your comfort zone. Ultimately, we are networking to achieve things, not

networking for networking's sake. Networking up may require you to embrace discomfort as you try different approaches to enlarge your networking web. As you seek help from your networking-up connections, at some point you will be senior to others (e.g., a senior graduate student), and when someone seeks advice from you, be sure and give them the same courtesies and consideration given to you by your network.

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